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set up a rattling for the sake of enticing birds to them, but that they would slowly and cautiously approach their victim, or else lie in wait ready to give the fatal spring upon anything that came near. He believed that the rattle was in reality a detriment to the snake, except in so far as it served to call the sexes together, which he thought was most likely its true function.

FLIES AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATING CONTAGIOUS DISEASES.—Prof. Leidy remarked at a late meeting of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, that at this time, during the prevalence of small pox, he was reminded of an opinion he had entertained that flies were probably a means of communicating contagious disease to a greater degree than was generally suspected. From what he had observed in one of the large military hospitals, in which hospital gangrene had existed, during the late rebellion, he thought flies should be carefully excluded from wounds. Recently he noticed some flies greedily sipping the diffuent matter of some fungi of the *Phallus impudicus*. He caught several and found that on holding them by the wings they would exude two or three drops of liquid from the proboscis, which, examined by the microscope were found to swarm with the spores of the fungus. The stomach was likewise filled with the same liquid, swarming with spores.

## G E O L O G Y.

EXTINCTION OF BIRDS IN MAURITIUS, ETC.—I believe I have demonstrated, by the examination of the bones which have been found in the recent deposits in the Mascarene Islands, and which belong, for the most part, to extinct species, such as the dodo, the solitaire, the aphanapterex (*Fulica Newtoni*), large parrots, etc., that these islands have once been part of a vast extent of land, that these lands, by little and little and by a slow depression, have been hidden under the waters of the ocean, only leaving visible some of their highest points, such as the islands of Mauritius, Rodriguez, and Bourbon. These islands have served as a refuge for the last representatives of the terrestrial population of these ancient epochs; but the species, confined in too limited a space and exposed to all causes of destruction, have disappeared by degrees; and man has in some measure aided in their extinction.

Madagascar evidently was not in communication with these islands; for when Europeans visited them for the first time, they

did not find there any Mammalia, with the exception of some large bats; none of those remarkable Lemuridæ peculiar to the fauna of Madagascar existed in the Mascarene Islands. The study of fossil birds leads to the same result; and three species of *Æpyornis* which Mr. A. Grandidier and I have been able to recognize among the fossils collected in the swamps of the south-west coast have enabled us to establish the relationship which connects these birds with the *Dinornis*, the *Palypteryx* and *Aptornis* of New Zealand. All these species belong to the same zoological type, and make us feel that at a more or less remote epoch there may have existed some communication between these lands so far away from one another; perhaps groups of islands, now submerged, formed intermediate stations, of which unfortunately we have no trace.—A. MILNE-EDWARDS, from *American Journal of Science and Arts*.

THE EOCENE GENUS *SYNOPLOTHERIUM*.—This genus rests on a single species of about the size of a black bear, from the southern Wyoming Eocene. Many parts of the skeleton are preserved, and furnish the following characters. The toes of the fore foot are four, the outer materially shorter than the others; the claws flat, ovate, and deeply fissured above; the tail slender; the head with a flat muzzle with anterior nareal exposure and premaxillary bones much contracted below, and with a wide lateral vertical groove. Immediately behind this projects a huge canine tooth, and the outer face of the outer incisor is exposed in its bottom. There are three upper incisors, the median two much smaller than the external, which is as large as many canines. The mandible had six molars, the last shorter than the penultimate. They are separated by a toothless interval from the incisors, which are very large and directed upwards and forwards like those of a rodent. They oppose the outer incisors at the extremity, and the canine superiorly and laterally, performing thus a double service.

This form is evidently allied to the genera *Anchippodus* of Leidy and *Psemotomus* Cope, as well as to the larger *Loxolophodonts* and are either forms of *Proboscidea* or represent those connecting this group with the *Perissodactyla*. They are thus of interest, and their full analysis cannot fail to be of value to zoology — EDWARD D. COPE,\* A.M.

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\* Read at the Dubuque Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Aug., 1872.

GLACIAL ACTION IN FUEGIA AND PATAGONIA.—Professor Agassiz of the Hassler Expedition, as we find in the “American Journal of Science and Arts,” gives an interesting account of land ice action in these countries, describing rounded and polished rocks, boulders, and glacial scratches. Prof. Agassiz concludes from the character of the north and south sides of the summits in Fuegia, and from other facts, that the movement of the ice was towards the north, and independent mainly of the present slopes of the land. The region over which he states that he observed glacial phenomena in southern South America includes all of the continent south of 37° of south latitude both on the Atlantic side (Bay of St. Matthias) and the Pacific side.

NEW LAND SHELLS FROM THE COAL MEASURES.—Prof. F. H. Bradley describes and figures in the August number of the “American Journal of Science and Arts” two new land shells from the coal formation of Illinois. It will be remembered that Dr. Dawson found many years since a pupa (*P. vetusta*) in the same formation in Nova Scotia. The new pupa is called *Pupa Vermilionensis*. The other shell, referred by Messrs. Meek and Worthen to a marine family (Rotellidæ), Mr. Bradley considers as a helicid, and describes it under the name of *Anomphalus Meekii*.

## ANTHROPOLOGY.

A REMARKABLE INDIAN RELIC. — Having a few days of leisure, I started on Monday last, in company with my friend, J. F. Bly, Esq., to visit the fish-breeding establishment of Jazael Robinson at Meredith Village, N. H., hoping to make some pleasant additions to my rather limited knowledge of Natural History, to refresh the memories of beautiful scenery about the lake, and breathe again the air of the mountains.

The process of fish breeding and raising was elucidated by our guide with so fascinating an interest that we ceased to wonder at the prevalence of “fish fever.” Some five thousand trout in the lower pond were a foot or more in length and ravenous for something to bite. A finger held within an inch of the surface was sure to be jumped at and seized — as was a gentleman’s nose which happened incautiously to be held too near the water.

On returning to the village we inquired for any object of scientific interest which might be worth seeing, and were told at once of